

The Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial

by R. Sturgis Ingersoll

*photographs by
Tana Hoban and Edward Gallob*



View of North Terrace

Ellen Phillips Samuel, a Philadelphian, had been a generous supporter of cultural matters throughout her life, and for many years an active member of the Fairmount Park Art Association. She died on October 1, 1913, leaving her estate, subject to a life interest in her husband, J. Bunford Samuel, and after substantial legacies to friends and Philadelphia institutions, to the Art Association, to apply the income in creating, on a 2,000-foot strip bordering the Schuylkill River, statuary “emblematical of the history of America—ranging in time from the earliest settlers of America to the present era.”

Following the death of his wife, Mr. Samuel expressed great interest in her project and during his life commissioned and had instated at the south end of the strip the standing figure of Thorfinn Karlsefni by the Icelandic sculptor Einar Jonsson. On his death in 1929 the generous fund, totaling approximately \$700,000, came into the possession of the Association to carry out the directions of Mrs. Samuel’s will. Under the administration of the Association, this bequest increased substantially.

There were several challenges to be met. In the year of the execution of her will, 1907, Mrs. Samuel selected a strip of greensward bounded on the west by the Schuylkill River and on the east by the East River Drive, which was then a gravel road traveled almost exclusively by horse-drawn pleasure carriages—victorias, runabouts, phaetons, and occasionally four-in-hand coaches and tandem dogcarts. An automobile was a rare sight and as such was subject to a twelve-mile-an-hour speed limit. Between the greensward and the drive was an asphalt pavement used by strolling pedestrians on a clear afternoon. By the time the Association received the fund, the horse had disappeared, the strollers had all but disappeared, and the drive itself had become a blacktop highway crowded through the day and night by speeding automobiles. The location, however, could not be changed.

The major challenge was to determine the best approach in carrying out the donor’s directive to create an “emblematical” history of America. For several years thoughts were exchanged back and forth. The alternatives

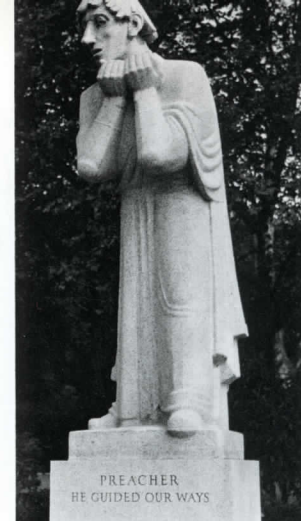
seemed to be to erect a row of portrait statuary of the important political and spiritual shapers of our destinies, or sculptural symbols of such abstractions as Faith, Democracy, Wisdom, Patriotism and Justice. Both of these concepts were rejected by the rather youthful committee of the Association's trustees, appointed by its president. Since the writer is the only surviving member of the committee as it functioned through the years, he will refer to the committee in the first person.

We concluded that the subject matter of the statuary should be an expression of the ideas, the motivations, the spiritual forces, and the yearnings that have created America. The Association's architect, the distinguished Paul Cret, envisaged the setting for the statuary as consisting of three terraces with groupings of statues at both ends of each terrace. In passing, we desire to record the invaluable aid tendered to us by Mr. Cret and his staff, headed by John Harbeson, not only with respect to architectural factors, but also in the commissioning of the sculptors and in the innumerable details inherent in a project of this nature.

After the settings had been designed, we broke down the chronological sequence of the subjects into six categories: (1) the early settlement of the eastern seaboard; (2) the creation of a nation by the political compacts of 1776 and 1787; (3) the trek westward; (4) the consolidation of democracy and liberty in the mid-nineteenth century by the freeing of the slaves and the welcoming to our shores of countless Europeans, featuring, in essence, opportunity for all; (5) the physical development of man-made America; (6) and finally, the spiritual factors that shaped our inner life. From the beginning we planned that inscriptions would be incised in stone behind or flanking the sculptures, quoting American literature, either imaginative or political, as a method of passing down noteworthy expressions of our culture in permanent form. The members of the committee separately spent many hours researching the wide field from which quotations might be drawn. We would then meet, compare notes, and reach conclusions.

In January, 1933, at the annual meeting of the members of the Association, the committee presented its program, which was unanimously approved and for the ensuing decades quite closely adhered to. A principle which we religiously followed was that of giving the sculptor the theme and then letting him interpret it without interference by the committee. This indeed presented challenges to the sculptors. We did, however, reserve the right to reject a sculptor's development.

The central terrace was the first one to be constructed. We had decided on a major group expressing the Spanning of the Continent, with flanking figures of a Ploughman, "who broke the land for harvest," and a Miner, "who searched the earth for treasure"—land and gold being the motivations of the movement. The major complementary group was to express the aspiration for freedom, with flanking statues of an unshackled



Slave and an Immigrant, seeking release from lands across the sea.

It was now our obligation to select the sculptors. To guide us, we organized an International Exhibition of Sculpture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1933. Through invitations to sculptors in Europe and America, North, Central, and South, we first received innumerable photographs. From these and our personal knowledge of the work of many of the sculptors, we invited a large number to send to the exhibition, at our expense, one or more pieces of their choice, not necessarily those represented by the photographs. As a result, 364 works by 105 sculptors were assembled in bronze, stone, wood, and plaster, covering a wide range of tastes and styles.

With this field before us, we commissioned Robert Laurent to create the major group emblematical of our western migration, J. Wallace Kelly, *The Ploughman*, and John Flannagan, *The Miner*. For the other end of the terrace we commissioned Gaston Lachaise to create the major group expressing the aspiration for freedom, with Hélène Sardeau to create the flanking *Slave* and Heinz Warneke the *Immigrant*. A heavy blow fell when word came of the sudden death of Gaston Lachaise in 1935. He had completed a one-quarter scale model of his impressive, imaginative concept, which gave every

promise of being the germ of a masterpiece. We had it cast in bronze, and it is now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Maurice Sterne was commissioned to take Lachaise's place.

Laurent's *Spanning the Continent* is a highly successful monument, embodying the essential theme; *The Ploughman* by Kelly is a stone carving in the best of all traditions; *The Miner* by John Flannagan, certainly the greatest American stone carver, was not up to his full standard, due doubtless to his deteriorating health. The three other artists, Sterne, Sardeau, and Warneke, expressed the theme of freedom, with the freed Slave and the Immigrant searching for and finding a new way of life, no longer earthbound.

We believe that the quotations incised on the stone backgrounds of the two major groups were particularly apt; two by contemporary poets and one each by Abraham Lincoln and William Cullen Bryant, of the Civil War generation:

Spanning the Continent

*The valleys and gorges are white with the covered
wagons,*

Moving out toward the west and the new, free land.

Stephen Vincent Benét

America is west, and the wind blowing,

Spirit of Enterprise





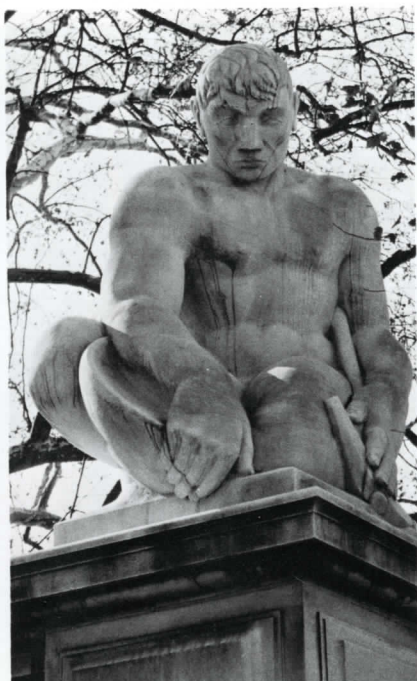
Spanning the Continent



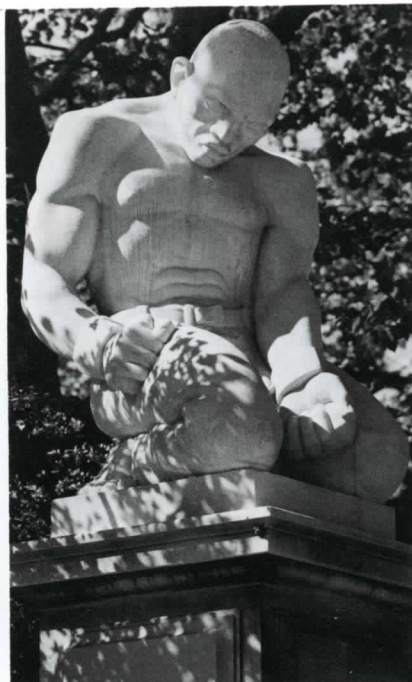
Welcoming to Freedom



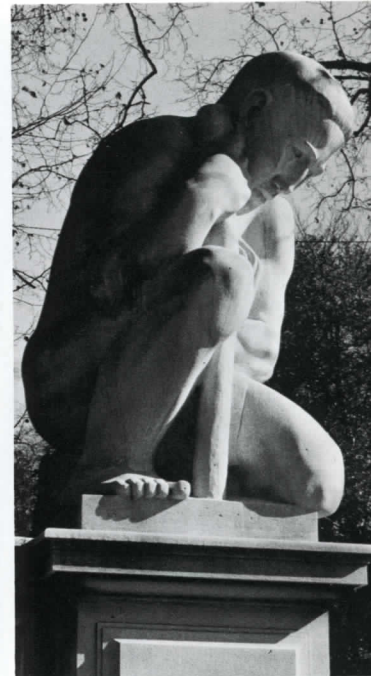
Ploughman



Miner



Slave



Immigrant

*America is a great word, and the snow,
A way, a white bird, the rain falling,
A shining thing in the mind, and the gulls' call.*

Archibald MacLeish

Welcoming to Freedom

*With malice toward none, with charity for all, with
firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let
us strive to finish the work we are in.*

Abraham Lincoln

*Here the free spirit of mankind, at length,
Throws its last fetters off; and who shall place
A limit to the giant's unchained strength,
Or curb his swiftness in the forward race?*

William Cullen Bryant

The International Exhibition of 1933 had been a public success and of great value to us in selecting the sculptors for the central terrace. With the architectural components of the south terrace nearing completion, we organized and displayed, under the same procedure as in 1933, the Second International Sculpture Exhibition, on view through the summer of 1940. There were 431 pieces exhibited. European entries were limited because of the war.

The themes determined for this terrace were the Settling of the Seaboard and the Birth of the Nation. We

selected American artists identified more with the establishment and with national reputations than those who had created the pieces for the central terrace. The experienced monument-maker Wheeler Williams, who later became president of the National Sculpture Society, carved the somewhat conventional statement of the Settling of the Seaboard; flanking standing figures of a Puritan and a Quaker were by Harry Rosin, an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. With perception and imagination, Henry Kreis carved the double figure group signifying the joinder of youth and age in arriving at the compacts founding our government; flanking figures of a Soldier of the Revolution and a Statesman of that era were by Erwin Frey.

The sculpture in this terrace is markedly static and serious, perhaps too serious, lacking any romantic touch. Opinions differ but most would conclude that the sculpture in this terrace is inferior to that in the central one. It may easily be that the impact of the war, not a war of song and flag-waving, inspired a certain solemnity. The inscriptions were also serious, lacking the poetry of those in the central terrace:

Settling of the Seaboard

*If we consider the almost miraculous beginning and
continuance of this plantation, we must needs confess*

Puritan



Quaker



Revolutionary Soldier



that God hath opened this passage unto us and led us by the hand into this work.

Alexander Whitaker

I have great love and regard towards you, and I desire to win and give you love and friendship by a kind, just, peaceable life, and the people I send are of the same mind, and shall in all things behave themselves accordingly.

William Penn's address to the Indians

The Birth of a Nation

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . . And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Declaration of Independence

Except for certain finishing touches, all work on the memorial was suspended during the war and its immediate aftermath. By 1949, the income from the fund having been largely unspent during this period, we embarked with faith and enthusiasm in creating the north terrace, the faith and enthusiasm being justified by the

results obtained. In the summer of that year we held our Third International Sculpture Exhibition. There were 252 works exhibited, many from foreign countries. It was a noteworthy success, attesting to an awakening interest in sculpture—an attendance of over 250,000, widespread publicity in national magazines, a sculptor's day, consisting of invitations to all exhibitors to celebrate the art of carving and modeling and culminating in a double-spread photograph in *Life* magazine of seventy visiting sculptors seated on the main staircase of the Philadelphia Museum. Of the mass photograph, the salty Jo Davidson said, "Never had so many sculptors been scrubbed and assembled in one place before." It may be truly said that this awakened interest stemmed largely from the prior international exhibitions of the Association; the publicity given the Samuel Memorial was in marked contrast to the fact that, through the decades, sculpture, as has been said, had been the stepchild of the arts.

Our purpose in creating the north terrace was to express the physical and spiritual forces that made America, rather than historic incidents. We envisaged standing figures of the Poet, who shaped our dreams, the Preacher, who from Puritan days had guided our paths, the Scientist, who harnessed nature, the Laborer, who built our cities, railroads, and factories, and finally two

Statesman



major groups: one expressing our energy, termed by us "Constructive Enterprise," but later changed to "The Spirit of Enterprise," the other expressing that particular development of the twentieth century, "Social Consciousness."

From the 1949 exhibition we selected four artists to carve the individual standing figures: Waldemar Raemisch for *The Preacher*; José de Creeft for *The Poet*; Koren der Harootian for *The Scientist*; and Ahron Ben-Shmuel for *The Laborer*. These pieces were to be of granite in contrast to the limestone of the other terraces. Two artists were commissioned for the bronze groups—Jacques Lipchitz for *Constructive Enterprise* and Gerhard Marcks for *Social Consciousness*. The places of birth of these artists suggested an artistic League of Nations: Raemisch and Marcks, Germany; der Harootian, Armenia; de Creeft, Spain; Ben-Shmuel, North Africa; and Lipchitz, Lithuania. This variety was not intentional on our part, but in fact the diversity of cultural backgrounds is interestingly revealed in the sculpture produced.

We were disappointed with Marcks's study and he withdrew from the undertaking, but we substituted with great success the controversial Jacob Epstein, the Jew of New York's Lower East Side, who spent most of his life in London, where he gained fame and notoriety. As Lipchitz and Epstein progressed, it became apparent that their concepts in design, size, and content would not be appropriate for inclusion in the same terrace. Both artists were on the way to creating great monuments. We therefore arrived at a fortunate solution; the Lipchitz would be placed in the center of the terrace, flanked by the granite figures, the Epstein on the west terrace of the Philadelphia Museum.

The somewhat simultaneous creation of four monumental granite figures entailed a formidable undertaking. All but the work by Ben-Shmuel were cut by hand without benefit of mechanical chisels. We kept in close touch with the artists, visiting their studios to view work in progress, and welcoming them on their visits to Philadelphia. Epstein came from London twice and won our hearts and minds. Though in his seventies, he was an exceedingly agile workman. Henri Marceau, the co-chairman of the committee, visited London and saw Epstein's great figures through the casting process. Lipchitz spent months supervising the casting of his work at the Modern Art Foundry in Long Island City.

Finally, in 1960, with the placement of Lipchitz' gigantic bronze on its granite pedestal, the thirty-year endeavor to create an emblematic history of our country was concluded. Lipchitz was particularly thrilled by the words inscribed on the pedestal of his *Spirit of Enterprise*:

Our nation, glorious in youth and strength, looks into the future with fearless and eager eyes, as vigorous as a young man to run a race.

Theodore Roosevelt

Now, forty years after accepting the challenge presented by our benefactor's will, have we done well or

ill? First, we believe that we proceeded wisely in preparing and following the initial program; second, in holding the three international sculpture exhibitions; third, in granting to the sculptors freedom in interpreting the ideas set forth in the program. In most of our selections we broke away from the unimaginative, complacent tradition of American commemorative sculpture. We did not shy from representational art nor from artists identified with modern movements; we hoped to obtain pieces that would cause spectators to think and feel and, in a large majority of the pieces, we believe that we attained those ends.

The Samuel Memorial, including the Epstein on the terrace of the Art Museum, is the work of sixteen sculptors. Commissioning that number of sculptors within a span of twenty years was, one might say, a risky undertaking considering the period involved and the fact that since Saint-Gaudens and Remington creative sculpture in America had been in the doldrums. We believe we did well, perhaps we might have done better. It is our conviction that the end result expresses with serious inspiration what Ellen Phillips Samuel intended and that, with passing decades, the work will in no small degree be a pertinent manifestation of the culture of the mid-twentieth century. Certain of the pieces are true masterpieces, and there are few mediocrities.

In closing, it must be recorded that the late Henri Marceau was the sparkplug of the endeavor. Almost single-handedly he organized the three international shows, was the admired nurse of the architects and artists, and had that amazing capacity of being able to accomplish in one day what takes most of us three. We owe him a great deal.

Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973)
Spirit of Enterprise. 1960
Samuel Memorial,
East River Drive south
of Girard Avenue Bridge
Bronze, height 125"
(granite base 56")